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ABSTRACT

The first year as an assistant principal can be even more trying than a teacher's first year. Becoming an administrator is a personal and professional transition that requires a new perspective on schools and a new definition of one's role as an educator. The first year as an assistant principal also is important in setting attitudes and standards for the future. Socialization to a new work environment is a major step in making the transition into a new position as an administrator. Teachers who become administrators must also deal with moving from the isolated environment of the classroom to the more open and interactive atmosphere of the administrative office. Administrators must deal with the tension between teaching and administration. First-year administrators must also learn the school organization, define their role in the organization, and resolve conflict. Assistant principals also have to learn how to be in a secondary leadership position. Many new assistant principals feel overwhelmed and frustrated by the new role they must serve. New assistant principals must understand the transition to an administrative position, talk with other administrators, urge more realistic expectations for new principals, and engage in new administrator programs. (Contains 76 references.) (JPT)

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ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS OF FIRST-YEAR ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS

A Presentation at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Secondary School Principals

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ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS OF FIRST-YEAR ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS

The first year as a high school assistant principal can be very challenging. In some ways, it can be even more challenging than the first year of teaching. Becoming a teacher represents entry into the field of education and constitutes a clear break with the past. Major tasks involve the development of a perspective on schools and the definition of one's self as an educator. Movement into administration isn't as clearly transitional because the field of endeavor remains education and the site of operation remains a school. This masks the fact that leaving the classroom for administration is a personal and professional transition that requires the development of a new perspective on schools and redefinition of one's self as an educator.

Despite teaching experience and university preparation, the first year as a secondary school administrator is an uncertain period. Every day mixes opportunities, problems, joys, and anxieties in unpredictable ways. Performing successfully demands the investment of immense amounts of time, talent, and energy. The move from the classroom to the office isn't just physical, it's also intellectual and emotional. To increase the odds of a successful transition, principals need to help their new assistants, and assistants need to take steps to help themselves.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FIRST YEAR AS AN ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

Research shows that work experience is cumulative. The first year on a job is extremely important in setting attitudes, values, and confidence levels, and can have a profound effect on the new administrator's subsequent administrative career (Berlew and Hall, 1966; Buchanan, 1974). As is the case with first-year teachers, it is often a significant and defining experience. Indications are that the moral/attitudinal socialization that comes from the work setting is a more important determinant in future performance than is the technical socialization received in formal university preparation (Greenfield, Marshall, and Reed, 1986; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979).

There is significant research evidence that work transitions constitute major and consequence-filled events in the lives of both people and organizations (Louis, 1980b; Nicholson, 1987; Wanous, 1977, 1980). Successful socialization to the new job is a significant part of the transition and is very important for individuals. How an individual's career progresses and is managed by the organization influences both the quality of work life and the quality of the life outside of work (Feldman, 1976b). Research has established links between transfers and employee development (Pinder and Walter, 1984), between worker expectations and turnover (Wanous, 1977, 1980), between work transitions, home life conditions and non-work activities (Holmes and Rahe, 1967; Latack, 1984), between work transitions and

identity strain (Hayes and Hough, 1977), and between work transitions and health (Latack, 1984).

Socialization of a new employee is also important to the employing organization. Schein (1987) contends that the pace and success rates of socialization have great influence on systems of manpower planning. He argues that the effectiveness of socialization can determine the loyalty and commitment of employees, their level of productivity, and their turnover rate. An organization's stability and effectiveness, he suggests, are dependent upon its ability to socialize new members.

Schein's views are echoed by others. Feldman (1976b) observes that organizations today are becoming increasingly dependent on the commitment of members rather than on the control systems that held them in the past. Research by Wanous (1977) relates the effectiveness of socialization to job satisfaction and to turnover, both of which have economic implications for the organization.

Of particular interest in regard to new assistant principals as novice managers is Buchanan's (1974) argument that managers must be committed to their work organization if it is to survive in the long run. He holds that a basic responsibility of managers is to keep the organization healthy so that it may effectively carry out its work. His research indicates that the work experiences of the first year, which are a vehicle for a good measure of socialization, are critical in developing a sense of commitment in the newcomer.

The quality of the first year as an assistant principal is important not only to the person going through it, but also to the teachers, students, parents, and other administrators with whom that person will interact, now and in the future. As Catherine Marshall (1992) has observed, "the assistant principalship is the beginning of a career socialization process. Principals and superintendents are the outcome of this process."

COMING TO GRIPS WITH THE NEW PERSPECTIVE

There are two reasons why the first year as an assistant principal involves significant adjustment challenges for administrative newcomers. The first simply has to do with the nature of transitions, and the second with the specific nature of schools.

The Nature of Transitions.

Major life transitions -- such as reaching adulthood, marrying, becoming a parent, or losing a spouse -- have particular identifiable characteristics. They take the individual from the familiar to the unfamiliar and require changes in behavior and in assumptions about oneself. Today is not like yesterday, and yesterday's behaviors will not meet the needs of today. Transitions are turning points that sever established relationships and create new ones, and which force abandonment of former responsibilities and the assumption of new ones. People are required to develop new assumptions about themselves and their places in the scheme of things (Brett, 1984;

Hopson and Adams, 1977; Louis, 1980b; Nicholson, 1984, 1987; Nicholson and West, 1988; Schlossberg, 1981; Van Maanen, 1977).

Hopson and Adams (1977) regard any transition as having two necessary components: (1) a personal awareness of discontinuity; and (2) new behavioral responses. A person must recognize the changes in life as being break points and then must develop new behaviors because a new situation now defines the life space. People who do not recognize a situation as transitional frequently experience increased difficulties of adjustment.

Schlossberg (1981) defines a transition as a phenomenon that generates a change in assumptions about oneself and about the world. Based on the person's new assumptions of how things are, or are going to be, this change then requires a corresponding alteration in behavior and relationships. Louis (1980b) characterizes transition as both a change in the situation and the person, and as a period of time in which the change takes place.

All three of these definitions, and others like them (e. g., Spierer, 1977; Weiss, 1976), imply that while the specifics initiating change may be abrupt, there is a following time segment necessary for attitudinal and behavioral adjustment. Entering a new work organization is an experience that fits this concept.

The Nature of Work Transitions

Job transitions, like transitions in general, have definitions that vary in detail, but consistently capture certain notions. Louis (1980b, 1982) defines career transition as a

period in which an individual is adjusting to changes in the work setting, is changing orientation to the present work role, or is actually changing roles. Nicholson (1984) looks at work role transitions as any change in employment status or major change in job content. Van Maanen (1977) sees job transitions as break points that move people out of work situations that are certain, known, and familiar to ones that are not, and that require the individual to rework everyday work life assumptions, or to discover or formulate new ones.

Brett's (1984) definition is representative of the characteristics of most work transition definitions and, like the others, is useful for viewing the movement of an experienced educator into the role of assistant principal. Brett holds that a job transition involves any change in either content or context of the job: entry, relocation, promotion, people, places, equipment, tasks, etc.

The transition from teacher to administrator, even when it occurs in the same school, illustrates the process. First, there are specific differences in the tasks and orientations of teachers and administrators. When teachers leave the classroom, teacher perspectives and duties are discontinued and new administrative ones are assumed. Second, new behavioral responses are called for when staff members look to new assistants to solve problems or, more intently, when they look at assistant principals as causing some of their problems. Perhaps most importantly, new administrators are forced to reconsider their positions in the organization and its environment as a

result of their new authority and responsibility in motivating, supervising, and evaluating other adults. They are more visible and more accountable to the school as a whole, to the district office, and to the larger community outside the school.

The Nature of Schools.

Beginning administrators are often surprised by what they find in their new jobs. Because of their isolation in classrooms, teachers most often know little of what transpires in the office, in the hallways, or even in other classrooms in the building (Boyer, 1984; Davis, 1987; Lieberman, 1985; Lortie, 1975; Sizer, 1984). They are only rarely in a position to observe administrators at work over a sustained period of time. Despite the fact that teachers live close to administration, and are affected by its processes, few ever really get a close look at it in operation. When teachers move into the office, a whole new dimension of school operation opens to them, and its breadth, depth, and intensity are frequently surprising.

Douglas Mitchell and William Spady (1977; Reed, 1984) have offered a conception of schools which helps to explain the change in perspective teachers must accommodate when they begin administrative careers. Making the move from teacher to administrator requires major shifts in the way an educator thinks. Teachers and administrators work in separate, but connected realms in the secondary school setting and, while both roles are necessary, they differ in important ways. Mitchell and Spady identify these roles as "transformational" and "stabilizing".

Transformational and Stabilizing Activities. Schools have two interdependent and essential categories of activities: (1) transformational activities, which are activities oriented toward changing or transforming individual students through learning; and (2) stabilizing activities, which are activities oriented toward stabilizing the school as an organization; that is, the promotion and maintenance of consistent and acceptable behavior patterns by members of the organization.

Teachers generally are responsible for the execution of the activities in the transformational category. The classroom is the central location for the changing or transforming of students. It is the definition of learning. Administrators have the primary responsibility for maintaining stability through the regulation of teacher and student behavior and the encouragement of students to assume traditional school organizational values. Administrative stabilization activities and teacher/student transformational activities are common to all secondary schools.

Tensions Between Activities. There is a tension between transforming activities and stabilizing activities. The pressures of the transformational function encourage teachers to experiment and innovate. Teachers work to get students to individually master new and different skills and to explore and accept new and different belief schemes on an individual basis. Simultaneously, the pressures of the environmental stability function encourage administrators to get consistency and coordination of content from teachers and compliance to behavior standards from students as a group.

Teachers and administrators work in separate, but connected realms, and both roles are necessary in a school, but they are not always compatible. At some point, the activities of those involved in individual transformation and those involved in organizational stability will clash. Part of a teacher's job is to foster independent thinking and evaluation, while part of an administrator's job is to encourage the conformity necessary to maintain a stable working environment for teachers and students.

Teachers think in terms of an individual student: a student's grades; a student's attendance; a student's achievement; a student's behavior; and a student's graduation. Administrators most often think in terms of the aggregate: grade distributions; attendance rates; mean achievement scores; referral rates; and graduation/dropout ratios. In the administrative view, curriculum alignment, sequential learning, and discipline codes require convergent behavior from teachers and students, not divergent behavior and accommodations of individual preference.

Locked into the same building over time, individual expression and behavior clash with organizational norms of group behavior. It can be difficult for a person who has spent years making decisions and choosing behaviors for themselves and others from one perspective to move easily to the other. The beginning assistant sharply feels the differences between the teacher's concentration on the individual classroom and the individual student and the compelling attention to school-wide concerns required of the administrator. Struggling for the first time

with responsibility for overall scheduling of classes, campus discipline, facilities management, and teacher evaluation, the new administrator has to make substantial adjustments in order to think from the collective or aggregate perspective.

Compared to the classroom decisions individually made by a teacher, the potential for conflict with other adults, compounded by the conflicts of competing values and priorities in resource allocations, can be a shock to a beginning administrator (McNeil, 1988; Reed, 1984). How these conflicts are perceived and resolved, especially by the administration which controls authority and responsibility in the school setting, is important to both teachers and administrators (McNeil, 1988; Tyler, 1987; Woodring, 1989).

FIRST YEAR CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS

Research into how people make the adjustment to new jobs has produced evidence that mastering the new environment involves learning at least eleven different things, only one of which is how to actually "do" the job in a technical sense (Feldman, 1976a, 1976b, 1981; Louis, 1980a, 1980b, 1982; Nicholson, 1987; Nicholson and West, 1988; Van Maanen, 1976). To successfully make the transition from teacher to administrator, a person has to:

1. Be initiated to and master the actual tasks of the job;
2. Be initiated to the work group;

3. Define his or her own role within the group and in the accomplishment of the work unit's tasks; build a role identity;

4. Learn the local language;

5. Build relationships both within and outside the immediate work group;

6. Learn who are the important players in the organization;

7. Learn to deal with intergroup role conflicts; that is, handling the conflicts between his or her own work group and the demands of other groups in the organization;

8. Locate oneself in the work and social structure;

9. Develop a frame of reference to measure how and why things are done as they are;

10. Assess how well the unit of which he or she is now a part is doing;

11. Learn to manage conflicts between work and his or her outside life.

In accomplishing these tasks, the amount of information newcomers have to recognize, assimilate, make judgements about, and determine how to use can be crushing. It is filled with surprises, not only about the job, but also about themselves. Their ability to handle it depends on how well they have been professionally prepared, how much related experience they have had, how much they have been able to observe, and variables of their personalities and abilities.

Given those variables, people new in a position may be able to predict what will or should happen when they take an action, but they cannot accurately predict the internal feelings that will accompany what they do (Louis, 1980a, 1980b). Knowing

something in a cognitive sense is different than knowing it experientially.

New assistant principals may know, for example, that they will have to work more hours than they did as a teacher, but not know how badly they will feel about it. They may have been frustrated for years by the fact that seemingly incompetent employees are not forced to change or to leave, or that troubled or troublesome students are not swiftly and surely dealt with. When the time comes, however, for them to deliver negative evaluations to employees who are otherwise good people, handle expulsion cases, or be yelled at and cursed by an angry parent or colleague, they well not be able to predict the depth of the disturbing feelings they may experience.

Not all surprises about oneself are negative, however. Assistant principals may find enjoyment or fulfillment they never expected in certain elements of the job, such as discovering that they like making decisions that impact the lives of many others, they enjoy confrontation, they find the pace of the work energizing, or they derive an increased feeling of professional competency from the problem solving they do.

The surprises new assistant principals experience may relate to the tasks of the job, to the environment in which the job is performed, to themselves, or to all three. They may be positive or negative in nature. They will surely vary from person to person. The only uniformly consistent element to be found in the surprises is that they will be universal. Everyone becoming an assistant principal will in some way be surprised at the

differences between what they expected and what they found. Ironically, the only anticipation that new assistant principals can be sure will be fulfilled is that unanticipated events and feelings will emerge during their first few months or years in the office.

There are two fundamental reasons why new assistant principals are surprised by what they encounter as they begin their administrative careers. The first is that classroom experience does not educate teachers to the realities of administration. Too much of administration is invisible to the teacher in the isolated classroom. The second is that university preparation programs do not educate aspiring administrators to the real differences between the work of principals and assistant principals.

Teachers and Administrative Invisibility.

Experience in the classroom is helpful but far from sufficient in preparing teachers for administration. This is partly because of the structure of secondary schools, and partly because there is something of an irony in successful school administration.

The isolation of teachers previously discussed is compounded by an irony: as important as quality administration is to the functioning of a school, when it is done well its practice is largely invisible to teachers. Teachers only see that a given student is present for class, but not that the child may be there only because an administrator counseled, conspired, and

coordinated efforts with parents and community authorities to see that he is. Teachers expect that the building will be lit and heated, the books and materials will be there, the absent instructor next door will covered for, and the assembly, dance, meeting, athletic contest, or graduation will come off smoothly, but rarely see or give much thought to the volume of work behind any one of them; they only see the result.

Teachers are more aware of administration's role in student discipline, but even there large blocks of activity are - by design - hidden from view. Teachers know of the administration's involvement with the students they send from the classroom to the office, but far less frequently do they know of the preemptive and reactive steps administrators take to discourage or quickly quell hallway or lunchroom fighters, thieves, substance abusers, and non-student intruders before a major disturbance can erupt to interfere with classroom instruction. This is not by accident: one of the goals of administration is to shield the classroom and its occupants from disturbances of all kinds (Mitchell and Spady, 1977; Reed, 1984).

Teachers, in fact, contribute to the building of the screens that block their views. When a problem emerges, whether it is an overt classroom discipline problem that shatters the planned flow of events or a student's personal problem that may require so much of the teacher's time or attention that the class would suffer for it, teachers refer the student to the office.

As the student goes to the office, the teacher's opportunity to observe the dynamics of problem solution most often goes with

him. The teacher's attention is properly returned to the dynamics of the classroom. He or she will, in all likelihood, later receive a report from an administrator or counselor about the actions taken, but such reports are often like a friend's description of a recently seen movie. The interaction that produces real understanding is difficult to convey in a report.

Many schools do attempt to intimately involve teachers in the counseling of students and the resolution of discipline problems, and much good comes from it. Nonetheless, even the most involved teachers usually only see what happens in one case. They don't see the myriad and variety of cases an assistant principal handles in any given period of time.

Roughly the same pattern of events unfolds in problems of any type referred to the office, whether they have to do with students, the physical condition of classrooms, or the preparation of materials for some event. Conferences with parents or with other teachers, supervision of the clerical or maintenance staff, work with the police or social workers, budgeting meetings, schedule planning, and hundreds of other tasks large and small are handled while the teacher's attention is fixed on the classroom. Only when the teacher becomes an administrator and moves into the office does the work of the office really become visible. When it is revealed, its breadth, depth, and intensity are frequently surprising.

University Blindness to Assistant Principals.

As much as new assistant principals are not sufficiently prepared through teaching experience for what goes on in the office, neither are they adequately prepared through course work at the university. Universities prepare aspiring administrators to become principals, not assistant principals.

Aspiring administrators in American universities are schooled in technical skills and in tenet of leadership built on the notion that they will be the building leader. The result is that virtually every first-year assistant principal is surprised and shocked to discover that they are not prepared for the real differences in the two positions. The surprise is a result of the fact that, as tied into research as most universities are, their administrative preparation programs seem curiously blind to a substantial body of research regarding the differences between the principalship and the assistant principalship.

Ignoring the Assistant Principal's Level in the Organization.

The current leadership research paradigm assumes that the "leader" occupies the top place in the hierarchy. There is little or no attention paid to the simultaneous role of follower that has to be played by anyone who is not at the top of the hierarchy, such as an assistant principal. To be at different levels of the hierarchy is to experience the organization differently. Organizational studies have shown that jobs at different levels present their occupants with different leadership challenges and opportunities, and each requires a different set of skills and responses from the people who work

there (Pavett and Lau, 1983; Pelz, 1951; Schilit, 1987). Administrative research, in line with this, has demonstrated significant differences between the duties and responsibilities of principals and assistant principals (Austin and Brown, 1970; Gray, 1985; Jeter, 1993; Pellicer et al., 1988).

Yet, university credentialing programs rarely acknowledge and address these differences. The absence of such acknowledgment causes scholars to overlook critical elements in the dynamics of site level school administration and to consistently neglect the assistant principalship in teaching and research. Evidence of such neglect is found in the literature employed in administrative classes. For example, two major compendiums of educational administration research ignore assistant principals: The Handbook of Research on Educational Administration (Boyan, 1988) lists the assistantship in neither the table of contents nor the subject index, and mentions it only in one article as a location on the career path to higher positions. The Encyclopedia of School Administration and Supervision (Gorton, Schneider, and Fisher, 1988) does not mention the assistant principalship in its discussion of school administration roles. A review of textbooks used in university programs for initial administrative certification, reveals few that even mention the assistant principalship, and none that explore the nature of the office.[1]

This neglect not only weakens understanding in general, but specifically contributes to weaknesses in the preparation of aspiring administrators. It misleads and complicates their

adjustment to the realities of school work. Students are trained for the duties of the principalship and left with the impression that the duties, leadership demands, and opportunities of assistant principals are similar, if not identical. They logically expect to face the challenges they were introduced to and prepared for in their studies. Instead, they find themselves confronted with unfamiliar situations and having to cope with unexpected role demands. They encounter fewer opportunities than they had anticipated for exercising the kind of leadership they thought was at the heart of the job.

In the face of this, many become frustrated and alienated. In a 1988 study of secondary school administrator alienation, Calabrese and Adams discovered assistant principal levels of alienation to be higher than those of principals, and found that alienation increased with additional education. They concluded that this signaled the existence of significant differences between the idealized roles the assistants were trained for and their actual on-the-job activities, a conclusion supported by numerous other studies.

There are instances where principals have consciously strengthened the assistantship, giving priority to tasks that collectively translate to real educational leadership opportunities. Where that occurs, assistant principals are much more likely to be able to immediately put to use the things learned in their university programs. Unfortunately, while there is a call for increasing this kind of job definition, and a slight trend in this direction is currently perceivable, the

reality is that most assistant principals, most of the time, do not enjoy the invitation to lead (Bates and Shank, 1983; Brown, 1985; Gross, 1987; Hall and Guzman, 1984; Jeter, 1993). Until the day comes that an assistant principal's job really means assisting the principal in policy formulation, instructional decision-making, and educational leadership, preparation for the principalship won't alone constitute adequate preparation for the assistant principalship (Greenfield, 1984, 1985; Greenfield, Marshall, and Reed, 1986; Koru, 1993).

It's no wonder that a beginning administrator can feel overwhelmed. Frequent reports of early uncertainty, estrangement, and "shock" appear in the literature about assistant principals (e. g., Marshall, 1985, 1992; Nelson; 1986). The most recent NASSP study of over a thousand high school principals and assistant principals supported the findings of other studies by indicating that assistant principals are involved in virtually every aspect of school operation (Pellicer, et al., 1988). With such widespread and comprehensive duties, the potential for shock, surprise and frustration in the new assistant principal is very high.

Feelings of frustration, surprise, disappointment, lack of appreciation, self-doubt, and self-blame are common experiences for new middle managers in just about every field (Feldman, 1976a, 1976b; Nicholson, 1987). Research has indicated that people in middle management positions tend to work at a hectic pace and experience fragmented days (Mintzberg, 1973). They frequently feel as though they have little impact, but

simultaneously feel a great responsibility for the smooth functioning of the organization. They feel they receive little support and appreciation from those both above and below them in the hierarchy. Continually pressured by subordinates and superiors to perform certain roles, they feel a great deal of uncertainty about the scope of their responsibilities. Consequently, they can feel isolated and distressed (Oshry, 1980).

If these feelings are allowed to grow and intensify, the assistant principal's performance will suffer and, ultimately, he or she may even decide to leave the position. When that occurs, both the individual and the organization suffer a loss of investment and the fruits of the fulfillment of the employee's potential (Louis, et al., 1983; Mowday, et al., 1982). It is traumatic for both the district and the employee.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP NEW ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS ADJUST?

All the emotional challenges associated with promotion to an assistant principalship probably cannot be prevented. It is the nature of change and transition to be traumatic. There are steps, however, that can be taken to minimize the effects of the transition and facilitate the earlier achievement of top performance by the new administrator.

1. Make Sure The New Assistant Principal Understands The Transition Experience and Process.

Fundamental to transition success is an understanding that a transition is taking place. Research has demonstrated that people do not always recognize they are undergoing transition and act or think accordingly, especially -- as in schools -- if the new environment is similar to the old one in important ways (Hopson and Adams, 1977; Louis, 1980a).

People experience increased difficulties of adjustment when they don't recognize changing situations as transitional. To the extent that the old and new environments share common features, it may be very difficult for a person to build a new repertoire of responses (Brett, 1984). Because schools are essentially similar, it is possible that a new assistant principal may not fully realize the extent of the transition at the outset. When old behaviors do not produce the results desired in the new environment, tension is produced and uncertainty increased (Brett, 1984).

Uncertainty is the universal companion of change. Stress literature, careers literature, and transition literature all focus on uncertainty as a key variable in understanding the results of job changes (Brett, 1984; Feldman and Arnold, 1983; Feldman and Brett, 1983; Jones and Gerard, 1967; Louis, 1980, Nicholson, 1987). There are two types of uncertainty common to work transitions: (1) behavior-outcome uncertainty and (2) effort-behavior uncertainty (Brett and Werbel, 1980). Behavior-outcome uncertainty results from not knowing how to behave in order to achieve a desired outcome in the new environment. The

newcomer needs time to learn what is required to be evaluated as a good performer. This is often followed by effort-behavior uncertainty, which is basically analogous to self-doubt. The newcomer wonders whether he or she has the ability to deliver the behaviors needed to produce the desired outcomes. Unless a new assistant principal is aware of the nature of job transitions and the accompanying uncertainties, the feelings resulting from changes and changing responses can be bewildering, perhaps overwhelming.

The odds of assistant principals feeling more secure at an earlier time will increase if they have some idea of what to expect, not only of the job, but of themselves. They need to be made aware of the psychological changes and challenges that accompany a job transition of this magnitude.

Assistant principals can help themselves with this by reading about job transitions and career socialization. Principals can help by relating experiences and feelings from their own pasts, by providing the new assistar th a series of selected readings, or by arranging for men s. The district can offer help in a quality in-service or administrative staff development program.

2. Encourage Feedback and Feedback Seeking In Every Way Possible.

Principals should develop deliberate feedback programs for new administrators. It is unlikely that new assistant principals will share all, or even the majority, of their problems and concerns with their supervisors. Nor it is realistic to expect

that new assistant principals will gain needed information from formal evaluations alone, nor that they will feel free enough to ask for assessments in the early days of their tenure.

This is a dangerous situation because good performers can interpret an absence of feedback as disappointment or disinterest (Feldman and Arnold, 1983). Without feedback, new assistants are left to gain their information from observing how others react to what they do. This involves a high level of inference, which is ever subject to error, especially if the inferences are made in light of the experiences and accepted norms of their former roles as teachers (Ashford and Cummings, 1983).

There is a real need to encourage inquiry in new assistants and this can be helped along by working to create an atmosphere of non-threatening two-way communication among administrators, and this can probably be done best through a planned effort. There are at least four things principals can do to put this into operation:

- Meet regularly with the new assistant principal, not just when there is a problem, and especially not just when the newcomer has made a mistake or been the source of a problem.
- Come down the hall irregularly, "just to see how it's going." An investment of five minutes of interest in personal adjustment can pay dividends later. The principal might relate some of the experiences, surprises, and uncertainties of his or her first year as an assistant, and relate stories of the help gotten

from other assistant principals or the principal at that time.

- Encourage the new assistant in relationships with other administrators at both the site and district levels who are not involved in assistant principal evaluation. These are people with school expertise, experience in the district and a knowledge that can help a newcomer more quickly make sense of the situation.
- Immediately involve the new assistant in projects or committee assignments where responsibility is shared with other administrators and staff members. The new assistant can benefit from seeing how the principal, teachers, classified leadership, and especially how other assistant principals make judgments, handle new ideas, disagreements, and problems.

3. **Reduce Unrealistic Expectations in New Assistant Principals.**

Research suggests that everyone new to a job will experience varieties of surprises, both about the job and about themselves in relation to the job (Louis, 1980a; Nicholson, 1987). One of the vital tasks of someone new in a job, and one of the most difficult, is reconciling these differences between expectations and realities (Feldman, 1981; Louis, 1980a; Nicholson, 1987; Wanous, 1977).

Differences occur for three reasons. First, organization representatives always attempt to present the job in its best light to attract candidates. Second, expectations are both conscious and unconscious, and one cannot accurately predict

emotional reactions to experiences thus far only had vicariously. Third, not only are specific aspects of the job unfamiliar, certain aspects are unknowable in advance. For an assistant principal newly exposed to such things as the problems of student discipline, the experience of teacher supervision and evaluation, and the frustrations of dealing with the simultaneous legal and social demands and limitations placed on schools, the surprises can be intense and unsettling. An accurate explanation of job demands, as well as of rewards, helps to reduce the gap between expectation and reality when the position is actually assumed.

An important part of such a job clarification must include an explanation of the potential role conflicts new assistant principals will encounter. The significance of role conflicts needs to be emphasized. New assistant principals experience high levels of role conflicts as they attempt to recalibrate their thinking from teaching to administrative perspectives.

Role theorists suggest that a person's behavior can be shaped by his or her perceptions of how other people want that person to behave (Lindzey and Aronson, 1988). Assistant principals are subject to the expectations of a large number of people: other assistant principals; the principal; the district; the teachers; the students; the parents; and the values and expectations they held for themselves as teachers. An assistant receives direction from the job description, from the principal's orders or suggestions, and from the district office. Further expectations are received from teachers, students, and parents, sometimes directly and sometimes more subtly. Inevitably, an

assistant principal gets caught in what leadership researchers call a "role conflict" (Yukl, 1980).

Examples of role conflict are abundant in assistant principal work: the conflict between always supporting teachers and being just in discipline application if the student is in the right; the role conflicts found in serving as both a facilitator and an evaluator, simultaneously trying to be a sounding board or confidant for teachers and being responsible for their evaluations; the constant tension between excellence and efficiency where conflict is felt in assigning a teacher outside his or her area of expertise because the master schedule will not work any other way, or in recommending a teacher of lesser academic talents for employment because he or she can coach as sport. The list is long.

New assistant principals can be greatly bothered by role conflicts, and need to be aware of them as a part of the job. Advance contacts with people already serving as assistant principals can help greatly with this (Nicholson, 1987). Efforts to provide realistic job previews should include contact with the people who will be the newcomer's peers. Peers are perhaps the most important factor in helping newcomers adjust and feel effective (Fisher, 1986; Latane, 1981; Louis, et al., 1983).

4. Complete The New Assistant's Professional Training Through an Administrative In-Service Program.

Research shows that many assistant principals do not have a very clear conception of the work life they are entering when

they take the job. One reason for this might be the current focus of university preparation programs.

University preparation programs are designed to develop educational leaders. In many, if not most, instances, this translates to the principalship. Students gain the knowledge and skills necessary to become effective principals if they have the inborn intelligence and talent to use them.

The difficulty is that most of the people completing administrative credential programs do not move directly into a high school principalship. It is not uncommon for an individual to move from the classroom to the principal's office in an elementary school, but it is a rare occurrence at the high school level (Austin and Brown, 1970; Pellicer, et al., 1988).

The majority of new secondary school administrators are going first to spend time as an assistant principal, if they ever become principals at all. This creates a situation that increases the odds of transition problems. University training programs largely prepare people for positions that they will not assume for a period of years, if ever. At the same time, They do not specifically prepare them for the job they are most likely to have.

Calabrese and Adams (1988), in a study of alienation among secondary school administrators, found the alienation level of assistant principals to be higher than that of principals, and discovered that the level of alienation increased with the level of education. They argue that "the fact that they are more alienated with advanced higher education lends support to the

notion that the difference in their idealized role with actual on the job activities may be a prime explanatory factor (p. 95)."

A particularly graphic example of this is seen in the administration of discipline on a high school campus. Over ninety percent of high school assistant principals nationwide are charged with some measure of discipline responsibility (Austin and Brown, 1970; Hentges, 1976; Pellicer, et al., 1988; Reed, 1984; Smith, 1984). A survey of university programs, however, does not indicate a propensity toward offering, let alone requiring, training in the administration of discipline.

Serious implications attach to this. The nature of discipline problems in high schools has evolved to the point where assistants are regularly involved in situations pregnant with opportunities for physical, emotional, and legal difficulties. They are involved in searches of possessions and persons, weapons offenses, confronting intruders, dealing with purveyors of drugs and alcohol as well as with individuals under their influence, vandalism, theft, and assaults upon students and staff. And they are not trained for it.

It can be argued that they are not trained for it because it is not viewed by many as a feature of instructional facilitation or leadership. Yet, discipline is one of the salient tasks in the preservation of school stability necessary for instruction to proceed in an orderly fashion. High school principals do not routinely handle discipline cases unless they are referred to that office by the assistant or brought there on appeal by the

student, a parent, or the parent's lawyer. Assistant principals do handle discipline.

The need for particular training for the new assistant principal is made clearer when consideration is given to evidence that at least part of the decision to promote in an organization is based on the level of performance in the current position (Mobley, 1982; Stumpf and London, 1981).

5. Create a New Administrator Support Structure That Will Operate At Least Until The New Assistant Principal Creates One of His or Her Own.

There are three reasons for establishing a new assistant principal support system: (a) new assistants have lost the support system they enjoyed with fellow teachers; (b) unless several new administrators come into a building at the same time, it is easy for a single new assistant to feel isolated; and (c) newcomers need specific information about the nature and quality of their jobs which cannot be gotten from subordinates, along with an opportunity to test their observations and interpretations on others.

Teachers who become administrators lose the support system of teaching colleagues. Research studies have shown that teachers who become administrators in the same school where they were teachers feel a change in their relationship with faculty members (Marshall, 1985). They are treated differently and do not any longer enjoy peer relationships with their former teacher colleagues. This loss of a support system is intensified if the new administrator takes a position in a different school or

district. In that event, even the physical presence of former friends and colleagues is lost.

In many cases, new assistant principals come into the position alone; one may be the only brand new assistant in the school. Predecessors are usually physically absent from the scene, and to ask for a great deal of help from the principal or the other assistant principals, who are veterans, is to risk being perceived as incompetent. Additionally, many districts, especially smaller ones, may appoint a new assistant principal only intermittently. Consequently, the induction of new administrators does not involve enough people each year to justify a district commitment to a new administrator support group or to a staff development program. The result can be that a new assistant can be left feeling isolated.

People undergoing job transitions need to have at least three things in order to adjust to the new environment: (a) accurate information about the new setting, including both its history and its current context; (b) assistance in developing an ability to interpret things in the new setting and role; and (c) development of relationships with incumbent workers who will serve as people to talk to and to test one's perceptions of reality against (Louis, 1980b).

Principals can address these needs by helping to create in-house support systems. If there are too few new assistant principals to justify a continuing in-service or staff development program, perhaps a new administrator could be assigned a "buddy" from the existing staff. The natural

evolution of a mentoring relationship with someone on the staff is to be preferred, but those relationships take time to develop and the new assistant principal's needs are immediate.

If there is a small number of new administrators, they could be released for a few hours each month to meet as a group, maybe with a senior district administrator who is not responsible for the evaluation of any of them. It also might be possible to establish some type of program through a local university in which new administrators from a number of districts might be able to come together to share experiences and feelings and begin the development of a support network.

Conclusion

Socialization to a new job position is inevitable. People cannot stand uncertainty. They will work to make sense of the new situation in which they find themselves. The management team of a district can allow the transition processes to play out haphazardly, or it can take steps to shape the experiences of new administrators so as to reduce uncertainty from the outset. In these times of limited resources, this is not an easy task to commit to. Still, the future of a district can easily rest on the quality of its next generation of leaders. Their smooth and effective development would seem a good investment.

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Footnote

1 Among the books that address school leadership without consideration to the assistant principal are

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L. C. Wilson. School Leadership Today: Strategies for the Educator. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1978;

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